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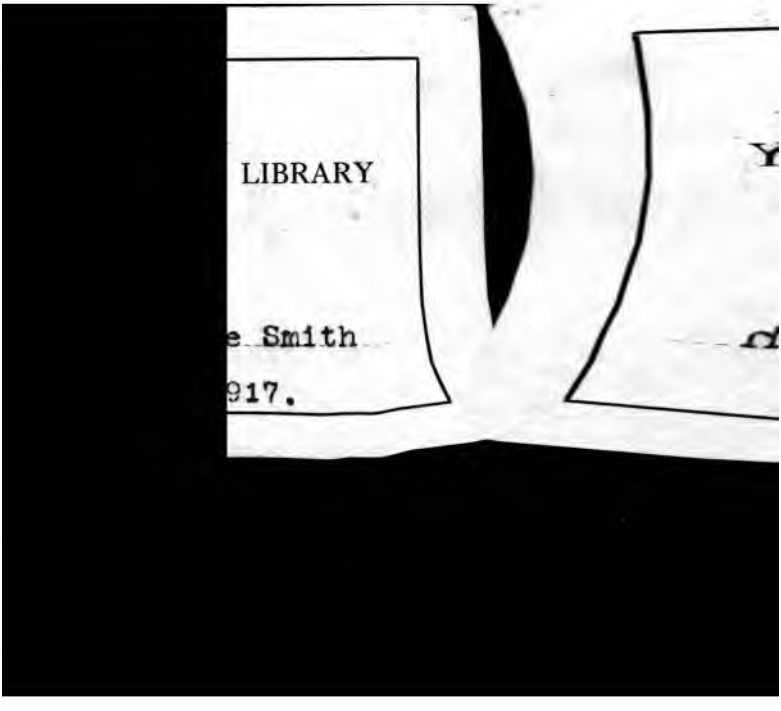
THE WITNESS OF DENIAL

VIDA D. SCUDDER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THE

WITNESS OF DENIAL

VIDA D. SCUDDER, A.M.

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E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
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1895

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PREFACE.

THIS little book is an abridgment of lectures given at Wellesley College during a course of instruction on modern English prose-writers. It may seem strange that thought so avowedly and entirely religious should find place in the study of literature; but the century is to blame rather than the lecturer. It was impossible to teach modern English prose ignoring such men as John Stuart Mill, Carlyle, Cardinal Newman, Herbert Spencer, Frederic Harrison, Frederic Denison Maurice, and Matthew Arnold; it was equally impossible to gain intelligent understanding of the work of these men and their relation to their age without some treatment of their intellec-

tual and ethical background. Lectures on the different phases of modern religious thought in England alternated, therefore, with critical studies of various authors on the part of the class. The lectures proved useful to the students; they are presented here to a wider public. The critical accompaniment has been discarded, except in occasional choice of illustration; and the impersonal presentation of thought, suitable to the lecture, has been supplemented and modified by frank judgment and comment.

The tone of the book throughout will be found, indeed, candidly Christian and Catholic. It were easy to disguise private conviction and to give a seemingly impartial treatment of great themes. Such a method may appear more dispassionate; it is assuredly less simple and less sincere. Personal bias is sure to exist, whether betrayed or not; better confess it at the outset. In a fair mind such bias may

help analysis instead of destroying justice; and there is no reason why readers should distrust an author because he acknowledges what he might have concealed. The Christian turns with eager interest to the revelations of the earnest agnostic, grateful for the privilege to see for a time through his eyes and gain a better and more sympathetic understanding of his point of view; the agnostic may surely follow a like impulse and gain a like advantage in wider outlook by turning to the reflection of his own thought as seen in the thought of the Christian.

But these modest and short pages will hardly appeal to the thorough agnostic; they speak, too often, a language strange to him, which he will reject as fantastic and unreal. The book is meant for those who seek, not those who are at rest; perhaps, indeed, it could reach no one who is not already earnestly wishing to accept Christianity. Even so, the number of

those to whom it is directed is very great. Should it give one helpful hint to three, or two, or one of that number, its existence will be justified.

VIDA D. SCUDDER.

Trinity-tide, 1895.

THE WITNESS OF DENIAL.

O God of Truth,
Make me one with Thee in eternal love.
Oft am I weary, reading, listening,
But all I wish and long for is in Thee
Then silent be all teachers, hushed be all creation
at the sight of Thee.
Speak Thou to me alone.

THOMAS À KEMPIS.

Scudder

ZET

I.

THE MOVEMENT OF DOUBT.

You call for faith:
I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.

BROWNING.

THE WITNESS OF DENIAL.

I.

THE MOVEMENT OF DOUBT.

NEVER, probably, has any century been so vigorous in mechanical activities as that which is slipping from our grasp; yet none has ever cared more strenuously for spiritual things. It has produced the modern system of business and competitive trade; it has also produced great movements in thought and faith and art. We may wail as we will over our passion for riches, our pursuit of ease. We may sink into profound discouragement as, passing swiftly through the streets of a modern city, we

realize the vast industrial energies devoted to life's mere machine, the comfort of the senses. But the instant that we pause we are conscious of a breath of power blowing perpetually through all our more material activities, to quicken, to purify, sometimes to destroy. The world of the spirit is dying no weary death; it is "mewing its mighty youth."

Do we ask for proof? We look at the great religious movements which during the century have shaken the souls of men—the Catholic Movement in France, the Oxford Movement in England, and that present social renascence which, consciously or not, finds source and spring in the Christian passion. We note the indirect witness of the eager haste with which every new activity, from a theory of science to a mode of writing fiction, has been dragged into the presence of religion and forced to define its relation to the spiritual life. Above all, we think of

literature—that great modern literature of every country of Europe, with its somber brooding over psychological problems, its spiritual unrest, its search for peace. Sometimes, as in the days of Homer, literature centers in the action of men; sometimes, as in the days of Shakespeare, it centers in their passions; to-day, as in the days of Dante, it centers in their souls. Whether Goethe in "Faust" gives us man's pilgrimage through the wide world, or Heine in his lyrics man's wail from his prison; whether Carducci and Hugo voice his cry of revolt, or Wordsworth and George Eliot his joy in obedience, through the whole sweep of modern literature interest is focused in the drama of the inner life. We see that this interest has been sustained and conscious if we think of the modern essay, as written by Mazzini, Carlyle, Arnold, Bourget; we see that it has been progressive as well if we trace the sequence of themes in the

modern novel from Scott to Meredith, from Dumas to Daudet.

But it is in the great movement of doubt that, paradoxically—and is not all life paradox?—the vitality of the spirit may be most clearly seen. For doubt is ever a sign of life, and never have men been so conscious of their souls as in this age when they are so fond of denying them. Scarcity-value, as economists would say, rests to-day upon untroubled religious conviction. The man who possesses it is grave, alert, and joyful, filled with gratitude for a gift granted to very few. Spiritual desire, not spiritual conviction, is the prevailing modern mood. Where others adored we question; where others obeyed we seek. "The same question-mark," says a French writer, "is for the modern world perpetually posed on a perpetually receding horizon." Between the Land of Conventions and the Kingdom of Faith lies the wide region of Un-

certainty. In its gray mazes the men of the modern world have wandered, seeking and suffering. Intelligent and peaceful activity is not for him who lingers there. To traverse this country has been the lot of some, to pause in it the fate of many. The throngs who abide there can never rest, though they never attain.

The century of Dante affirmed; the century of Voltaire denied. Our age has neither affirmed nor denied; it has inquired. There have been both loss and gain in our mood of challenge. "Fightings within and fears without," as the old hymn puts it, have been our heritage; but our generation deserves, perhaps more fully than any since the words were uttered, the blessing pronounced on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The same vigor which has shown itself in the increase of material energies, the extension of science, and the exploration of history is manifest in the passionate

eagerness with which modern men have sought for truth. The movement of doubt has gathered to itself much of the best life of the century. It has known a definite sequence with distinct successive phases; and its history must be understood, not only philosophically, but humanly and simply, by those who wish to be able to say, with Browning's aged prophet, "The Future I may face, now I have known the Past."

In the first years of the century the impulse of revolt and the love of humanity nearly sufficed the human soul. We cannot wonder at the passionate restlessness, the rebellion against tyranny, which is as much the key-note of religious as of social life. The Church—alas that we must say it!—stood seemingly committed on her thought-side to rigid and artificial dogma, on her social side to an aristocratic ideal. Most of the people who clung to her believed conventionally; a few—humble folk

for the most part—believed fervently; but nearly all the men of the future, the men vividly alive, made an exultant religion of freedom. The skeptical philosophies of the eighteenth century had prepared the way; then came the French Revolution, and energized to passion in the many that conception which had been inert in the intellect of the few. Greek stories tell that the mortal who surprised the face of oread or dryad was henceforth *numpholeptos*—possessed by a divine madness. In the Revolution men beheld the face of Freedom; and though she vanished like the fleeting nymph of the old mythology before her human pursuers, the mere vision was enough to inebriate them with celestial rapture. Shelley, for instance, is like a soul enchanted in the early years of the century; he and the many of whom he is a type are possessed by the simple joy of revolt, religious and social.

This stage of pure delight in escape from tyranny we have left far behind in our spiritual development. Something of it may linger in the intellectual provincialism of a man like Ingersoll; but the ablest and highest minds thrill no longer at the simple thought of freedom. The thought-movement of the age swept on. It developed next, in reaction from emotionalism, a phase akin to the dry temper of the eighteenth century. The philosophy of experience, as formulated mainly by the two Mills, father and son, is the direct forerunner of Darwinian philosophy. Already, in its system, conscience is not the voice of God within, but the echo of ancestral wisdom; religion has no objective correlative, but is the projection of the human shadow on the mists of the unknown. Expediency, in a refined sense, is to be the guide of life, and physical experience is the only basis of knowledge.

The "Autobiography" of John Stuart

Mill shows us, with a revelation exquisitely dispassionate and mournful, just what conceptions of this order can make of human life. It is one of the strangest books of the century; surely, also, one of the saddest. It tells us with scientific precision the story of a nature starting on a high plane, with few moral temptations to conquer and no mental confusion to overcome. It shows this man achieving an immense amount of valuable work, practising not only exalted, but subtle virtue, convinced to the end with his deliberate reason that life had yielded him as much of truth and joy and power as it had to offer a sincere intelligence. Yet no one can read the "Autobiography" of Mill, or his admirable books, and feel that in him the century has found a full representative, or human nature been set free. We trace through the book itself a significant progress from entire complacency to a dim sense of want. The want is met,

but only in part, by the poetry of Wordsworth, with its peculiar power to exalt all ethical emotions to the spiritual plane. As life goes on we feel that Mill gropes with more and more approach to consciousness after something not included in his philosophy. His unfinished essay on Theism strikes a new and wistful note. Yet he dies as he has lived, at rest within the limits of the natural reason. Spheres of experience which are the human heritage are closed to him. He is "shut out from the heaven of spirit."

Definite in a world of bewilderment was the philosophy offered by Mill; but popular it could not be. Strange though it seem, even in this most practical of worlds men refuse long to live without certain intangible commodities which they call ideals. The lost faith, rich in sacred emotion and lofty hope, was ill replaced by allegiance to Utility. In the barren philosophy of experience the century could

not rest. Its placid complacency is as much a thing of the past as the hot spirit of revolt which preceded and in part engendered it. Coldly mechanical, with nothing to quicken the imagination and little to fire the conduct, it was dying a natural death when an unexpected reinforcement from an entirely different quarter gave it a mighty impulse, bestowed on it a quickening power, and sent it out into the world to conquer under the guise of modern science.

It was not till 1861 that Darwin published "The Origin of Species." Before this time, as is evident from literature, evolutionary ideas were filtering through English thought; from this time for a third of a century they became a controlling influence in modern Europe. To prove this we have only to run over the table of contents of the chief magazines—sensitized plates as they are, swift to catch the reflection of the age-sky above. Evolutionary

theory in relation to art, morals, education, religion, may be said to absorb attention from 1860 to about 1885. Slowly another theme emerges; and to-day sociology and economics replace science as the chief inciters to speculation. But under the power of evolutionary thought we have each and all been trained. It has produced a whole system of ethics. It has shaped the great men who have shaped us. It produced the type of non-Christian thought of which those just entering middle life are perhaps most vividly conscious. Its power may be waning, but it is mighty yet.

To questioning souls, long starved on negations, science seemed at first, in its mere revelation of the physical universe, to offer a positive faith. The philosophy of experience had shut them within their own natures; the theory of evolution set them free of the world. The old vision of the New Jerusalem was lost to men; but

here was a new vision to take its place. Gazing backward, uplifted above that life of which they were a part, their freed spirits beheld a stream of mysterious energy flowing, in whirls of ever more complex life, from star-dust up to man. They saw the Power pulse upward, from nebulous and inorganic chaos to the ordered glory of the crystal earth; on to the thrill of life in tree and blossom; higher yet, till the silent gives response. Onward still they saw it sweep, through simple forms of animal life where reflex nervous action alone hints what shall come —on till "up the pinnacled glory leaped, and the pride of the soul was in sight"; till from the mass of inert matter was evolved the human race.

No wonder that in the dazzle of this great earth-procession men forgot, for a time, to gaze into the heavens. No wonder that in the revelation of the vast sweep to time they cared not to question eternity.

The very immensity of the evolutionary conception seemed at first to absorb attention and still men into awe.

But not for long. Soon it became evident that in all the mighty sequence there was nothing to satisfy the soul; that, long though the procession was which moved from seeming death to life, it issued from the void, and made, so far as the revelation of science was concerned, for darkness. For from shadows impenetrable on into a silence unbroken does the whirl of life revealed by science perpetually sweep. Thus the theory of evolution received, nourished, and recreated the philosophy of experience, and formed the next and strongest phase in the great negative movement of the century.

For it seemed to almost all thinking men, in the first excitement of that vision, that science had established a presumption, nearly strong enough for proof, in favor of a material interpretation of life.

All its wavering glory did but reveal and establish the supremacy of the sense. It showed, far back in the dim region of origins, matter alone, matter supreme. Once given the primordial atom, and force to work thereon, it seemed, to hasty inference, a mere matter of time to produce humanity. The old conception of a series of special creations vanished once for all; it was replaced by the strange picture of a world seemingly evolving itself, by its own power, from chaos to order, from nebula to man. The universal reign of Law seemed to rule out the possibility of miracle. The physical nature of man was seen to be derived, according to certain law, from the glutinous unity of the jelly-fish; could not his honesty, purity, kindness, be traced back in like manner to the first instinct of self-preservation in the species? Instead of descending from above, had not the moral nature ascended from below? The first teaching of evolu-

tion seemed cogently to confirm that which a radical philosophy had up to this time merely hinted; seemed to declare that body was not the servant of soul, but soul the slave of body; that mind was at best and highest a mere function of brain-activity, and that when brain once returned to the dust whence it was formed, mind, its shadow-action, would vanish, even as Plato questioned long ago, like music when the instrument is mute.

Thus science, as at first superficially conceived, seemed to banish God and immortality and to strengthen the movement of negation. Starting with the analytical temper of the eighteenth century, reinforced by the revolutionary passion, sanctioned by the criticism of the philosophy of experience, the movement might yet have fallen by its own weight but for this mighty help. The scientific temper, foe to all conventions, exalted the impulse of

denial to the duty of inquiry; the recognition of the reign of natural law strengthened the revulsion from artificial creeds. Our knowledge showed the seemingly tiny part we play in the system of nature; our ignorance suggested the vast sweep of truth outside our ken; and the agnostic temper was born.

Agnosticism! Dismal though humble title, denying, not that spirit exists, but that spirit can be known. Hardly a title in which to glory, since it implies that man is little and that truth is great. Unluckily those who adopt it give to the term at times the reverse significance, meaning that man is great and that nothing is important or essential which he cannot understand. But the spirit of the true scientific agnostic was from the first intellectual and sober, moderated by the caution which will know only what it can prove. It was to be still further disciplined, as well as still further strength-

ened, by influence from a new quarter. To the witness of metaphysical speculation and of natural science was to be added the witness of history. More direct than denial based on the revelation of the laws of nature, a new denial, based on the evidence of the story of man, took up the work of negation. The critical school, rejecting not only the assumptions but the facts of Christianity, destroyed credence in the authenticity of the documents which are the only witnesses of the Christian faith. Under this new influence the spirit of the agnostic movement soon altered. From fierce argument it passed into quiet assumption. To the minds of its advocates the cause of denial was won; and it became possible for a writer on theology brought up on Christian traditions and sensitive to Christian ideals to take as starting-point for his thought the statement that "miracles do not happen," on the ground that discussion of truisms is

waste of time. Modern agnosticism began as pure instinct of escape and rebellion; it passed into philosophical theory, thence into assertions concerning historic facts; and its strong sequence was complete.

II.

THE RENASCENCE OF FAITH.

Power was with me in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone.

IN MEMORIAM.

II.

THE RENASCENCE OF FAITH.

THE sun and the heavens are hidden. Over our heads extends a low curtain of vapor, heavy with the wrong of earth and gray with its sorrows. Among us there is light, dim and shadowless; there is warmth, for we live; but the Source of light and warmth we cannot see. Our heaven is but the exhalation of the earth, and unchanging and mournful is the light that streams through it. Yet, gazing upward into the mists, men exclaim with triumph that the world is growing larger to our sight. There was a time when all was defined, distinct; when great mountains leaped upward, radiant, into the smooth blue sky, and a far, sharp hori-

zon-line showed where earth impinged on heaven. Behold, all boundaries are swept away; there is nothing to impede our vision, and, unhampered by interruptions, our eyes, turn them where we will, peer serenely into infinite space.

We have watched the upward sweep of the cloud enshrouding us, the development of the modern movement of denial. In a thought-world where all, even the sky, is the output of our own earthliness many people recognize light, but claim that it has no location. Others, ignoring it, center thoughts and love in that humanity which it reveals. And some there are who, haunted by dim memories, mourn forever a vanished sun.

The impulsive rapture of revolt with which the agnostic movement was initiated could not long endure. Before a third of the century was over this mood had died, and vacancy ceased to inspire exultation.

No age, perhaps, has known deeper

spiritual agony than our own, or voiced more poignant cries of reiterated pain. Many of our noblest spirits have turned cynical and fierce of soul; many—and these the most exquisite—are paralyzed in the very nerves of life; many take refuge in silence.

Be silent, heart. What if thy pain be great,
What if thine anguish cannot be forgot,
Thy questions cannot sleep, thy doubtings wait?
It matters not.

"Think'st thou that in the universal woe
Which holds the world's great heart, thy tiny jot
Of anguish counts for aught? I tell thee, no.
It matters not.

"Then, O my heart, be silent! If thou die
Because the flame within thee burn so hot,
Die silently; for if thou live or die,
It matters not."

Thus mourns at last the soul which long has stood, as Carlyle puts it, "shouting question after question into the sibyl-cave of Destiny, to receive no answer but an echo."

Yet not all of these echo-servants, these children of loss, are silent or sorrowful. Some of them exult in the very stillness which meets their questioning cries. While some of the votaries of denial have suffered, others have triumphed. The denial of old faiths has become a banner around which have rallied praise, fidelity, and joy. Whole schools of thought today congratulate themselves that, leaving Christianity behind, they have pressed forward into a purer air, come nearer to the naked truth.

Now those who rejoice in this way have never rested in bare negation, for here the soul simply cannot stay. Religion is necessary to man; so much is witnessed by the whole story of human life, and never more strikingly than by the spiritual story of the nineteenth century. Those who have turned away satisfied from the religion of Christ substitute for it always a religion of their own. This has been true

from the time of Shelley to that of Emerson, from the time of Emerson to that of Matthew Arnold. And so the movement of denial has cast, in its varying phases, successive shadows of assertion which form a strange, sad sequence of their own. Each phase of doubt has had its positive aspect, its effort to find in its very negations solace and stimulus for the soul. To trace the development, phase by phase, of this positive movement within the limits of denial is perhaps an unattempted task; yet few attempts could prove more fruitful.

It is from the middle of the century that this tendency toward shadow-faiths becomes most clearly evident. The self-satisfaction of denial was from the first purely superficial; nor could the negative hypothesis satisfy long. Gladly, for a moment, men turned from the dreams of spirit to the facts of sense. But for a moment only. The profound sadness of non-Christian thought was barely inter-

rupted by the contempt of scientific denial. Not all the glory of scientific discovery, not the fascinating history of the Descent of Man, not the vision of the stars in their courses, arrested for more than a moment the keen search of the soul. Still it pierced by its longing beyond the glittering procession of visible life; still listened for some voice from the creative darkness whence the great procession starts. In the midst of that which they may investigate men sought that which they may adore.

It was then at this stage that first appeared the promise of the movement of reaction of which we are to trace the shadowy progress—the movement which, making no attempt to deny denial or to recall a banished faith, yet stretches lame hands through the darkness, and seeks, though it may not trust, a larger hope.

We want to trace the thought-origin and life-origin of these faiths which spring

from denial; we want to question their value to our souls. Is the attempt audacious? Surely it is necessary too. For, though the inquiry be so wide that answer is hopeless, yet is it also so definite that answer is essential. Has a higher substitute been found for Christianity? Many have made up their minds yes or no; for those who are still groping these pages are written. Keenly we need one another's comradeship in this sad yet tonic search; and the simplest line of thought, if it has led even one soul into peace, is worth the pointing out.

What attitude, what method, will best further our inquiry? Not, let us say at the outset, intolerance. Between pure, steady, literal agnosticism and Christianity there can be no moral quarrel, only a perplexed silence. But between the exponents of Christianity and of new systems of religious thought there is often mutual and deep hostility. "The only contempt-

ible thing in the world," it has well been said, "is contempt." With this unlovely and intolerant quality our minds are too often tinged. Yet absolute tolerance is the only temper in which helpful thought about these matters is possible; not the shallow tolerance of the newspaper or the man of the world, which springs from indifference, but the passionate and noble tolerance of the seeker, which springs from the love of truth. If we trust God we must believe that He gives some of His truth to every seeking soul; that the Light coming into the world lighteth every man; and that the Spirit moves and guides in all differing attempts to solve life's mystery. We can no longer say with easy minds that Christianity is true and all other faiths are of the devil. Yet, on the other hand, to many of us Christianity is not merely one faith among many, a dying phase of religious evolution. We cannot be quite sure that these

new faiths, of ethical societies, theosophists, positivists, are rising from its ashes glorified. Somehow it is a little hard for us to believe that. Somehow we remember times of bitter poverty and pain in our own lives, or yet more vividly, perhaps, in the lives of others, when the old words rose unbidden to our lips. Did we lie then? Did we feed souls on metaphors? Souls cannot live on metaphors; nothing can nourish them but facts. Christianity, unfortunately for the theorists, is not defunct. It shows among us an immense vitality. Its disciples, from a Salvation Army lass to Cardinal Newman, are perhaps the only thoroughly happy thinking people in the modern world. In any consideration of contemporary beliefs, on the inspirations of modern lives, Christianity must be taken into account.

The religion of the future! Where shall we find it? Ah, let us look for that faith which answers most fully the needs of the

human soul! Should it prove to be any modern substitute for Christianity we must accept it. Nay, if a new faith, however limited, holds any one new factor of spiritual worth, we must let our Christianity go. For if any religion springing avowedly from human thought alone can offer the soul something not held within the faith of old, then the religion of Christ must cede all claim to unique or supreme sacredness. It must take its place along with Buddhism, Mohammedanism, or the latest American system in religion—faiths all equally human because equally divine.

Let us try to find the faith most competent to set man free and make him noble —the faith of strongest appeal.

"The faith of strongest appeal! But why seek it?" murmurs many a sighing voice among the shadows. "To point it out is only to leave us sadder than before. Is desire the proof of fact?"

Many a sincere and noble spirit rejects

Christ because it so longs for Him, turns aside from faith because it is so an-hungered. "Christianity is so well adapted to the human mind," they cry, "that the human mind is quite capable of inventing Christianity." Belief in the Word made flesh is created by the craving for a perfect revelation; belief in atonement springs from the human cry for redemption; belief in immortality is the shadow, not of fact, but of desire. Browning, in "A Death in the Desert," describes lovingly and sadly these people. He describes their condition as

> "A lamp's death, when, suffused with oil, it chokes;
> A stomach's, when, surcharged with food, it starves."

It is hard to know how to meet them except as Browning does. Yet, to the theist at least, an answer is ready. Does intrinsic excellence argue truth? Is a faith, because beautiful, real? No, a hundred times no, if we have no hope and are

without God in the world. But for one who trusts the Creator, yes, a thousand times yes. For if God is not mocked, neither does He mock His children. Can the wish of man conceive any good which the will of God has not made fact? Can man think a holy thought not thought by God before him? Nay, but "before they call, I will answer"; and we who believe in the Father may rest assured that the higher and more satisfying our conceptions the more we may trust them and the nearer they approach to an adequate reflection of eternal fact.

Yes! If God is, and loves, the best must be true in Him, and the fairest faith which the soul can conceive is the most real. Let us look for this Best and Fairest. Let us study the subtle spiritual relationships of those differing modern faiths which have sprung from the movement of denial, and consider them not so much metaphysically and absolutely as with con-

stant reference to that human need and human nature out of which, after all, they spring.

Even to the agnostic this line of inquiry must have a certain significance. He knows, indeed, no God of whose reason our reason is the image; but he must accept in a measure, if he thinks at all, the validity of that thought-instrument which he uses. Perhaps he is also inclined to believe in the gradual development among men of the power clearly and justly to apprehend life; and so he must feel a slight presumption—since negative certainty is as impossible as positive—in favor of the truth which deliberate and symmetrical judgment pronounces most desirable. The highest result of evolution may have a certain balance of favor on its side, and the creed which best sets character free for progress is at least worth respecting.

Yet for agnostic, and, indeed, for theist as well, theoretical perfection is of course

no final evidence of truth. The witness of fact must meet the cry of need. Christianity can have no credence if simply a vision of what should be; it must be a statement of what is. Our plea for fact, for historic evidence, is manifest to-day in the wide critical movement which is examining Christian documents. This most wholesome and necessary movement our few slight pages cannot touch. But we must be conscious of our need before any evidence will convince us; and to consider what answer is given by different new religions to the cry of human need will prepare the way for inquiry into the external evidence of fact. To be sure, the advantage of much modern subjective religion is that it requires no external evidence at all; and in this aspect our line of thought might have even more value than we claim for it.

This is a little book of personal inquiry. It is not a theological treatise, and it does

not pretend to any theological or philosophical knowledge. It will not deal with abstractions, but with life, common sense, the revelation of experience. If it clears from the way of one or two explorers in the tangle of life even one tiny thorn-bush, it will have done more than it ought, perhaps, to hope.

III.

THE RELIGION OF MYSTERY.

I will not prate of thus and so,
And be profane with yes and no.

CLOUGH.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see.

III.

THE RELIGION OF MYSTERY.

THE desire for God! It can never die. The religious impulse! It is the supreme result of evolution. Thus it came to pass that in the very heart of scientific denial and the agnostic temper was soon generated a mystic somewhat calling itself religion.

Science had seemingly finished her work, had substituted for the Father of Lights, to be loved, obeyed, adored, blind Force, insentient Law. In vain did sensitive souls lament the ancient faith, which had upheld and blessed, purified and healed. Given the physical, to find a substitute for the divine—such was the new task set the spirit.

Darwin, the greatest mind in the scien-

tific movement, appears, strangely enough, to have had a nature closed to any appeal of the spirit. But the other leaders and representatives of the movement—men occupied less with the direct inquiries of modern science than with the bearing of these inquiries on life—were normally religious in instinct. They were restless without some working theory of man's relations with the universe as a basis for active life. It is Spencer who pursued the search with most energy—an energy springing, we are tempted to think, partly from the passion for system which produced a whole library of classification and analysis. A religious element was certainly latent in the evolutionary conception which he himself defined for us. What, he asked, might it be?

Science shows us a vast universe of ordered matter emerging from a mysterious void. Where is there here scope for the religious passion?

In the void itself, says Spencer. "Science," he writes, "gives us an explanation which, carrying us back only a certain distance, there leaves us in the presence of the avowedly inexplicable. Higher faculty and deeper knowledge will raise rather than lower the element of wonder with which we view the course of Nature and the Unknown Abyss beyond."

In the sense of wonder is the soul of religion. As the bright little sphere of our knowledge extends, it touches an ever greater surface of surrounding darkness; and the need becomes greater and the scope wider for that reverent recognition of mystery which shall make men humble and sane. From the days when the savage fearfully worshiped he knew not what, resident in the stone or tree, the apprehension of an unknown Force has been the eternal element of truth in the vagaries of religion; it is the only element which can abide enlightened search. The effort to

define that which is beyond our ken is the source of all fanaticism, and has led to all distortions of religion, from the barbarous anthropomorphism of the savage to the anthropomorphism, more refined, but equally unthinkable, of Calvinist theology. There was excuse for a religion founded on sentiment and assumption in the old misty days, excuse even for the fantastic ideas of our fathers, only less crude than that worship of ancestral ghosts in which they remotely originated. To-day such excuse has fled. Science removes from us heaven and hell, God above and the Spirit of God within. But sternest loyalty to truth leaves us somewhat—the action of natural law, and, behind this law, Mystery solemn, insoluble, and mighty. When all illusions of fancy, all deceits of desire are suppressed we find ourselves—the words are Spencer's—" in the presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed." Profound awe, intense

humility in this dark presence, are henceforth to form our religion, to nourish our spirits, and to replace the adoration charged with obedience and love with which, in less intelligent days, men prostrated themselves before the Father of Lights.

Instinctively, men began at once to call this kind of thought the Religion of the Unknowable. And by a right instinct. For not only unknown, but unknowable, at least to all criteria of science, the Energy behind phenomena and natural law must forever remain. Between this Energy and the spirit of man there is a great gulf fixed. That there is held within its darkness anything cognate to ourselves, anything to accept or summon love, we dare not assume. The highest spiritual state of the thorough agnostic is silent acquiescence in his own littleness; sacrificing every intellectual instinct of assertion, every emotional instinct of love.

> "I will not frame one thought of what
> Thou mayest either be or not,"

cries fervently the devout, doubting spirit. To how many among us this stern refraining from question, this abstinence from speech or thought, seems the only reverent attitude! How often is the impulse to approach the Infinite Majesty with the happy trust of childhood checked by the modern spirit whispering the fear, not only of folly, but of irreverence! The ardor of our worship is vitiated by the dread lest our deep feeling contain an unwarrantable assumption; the eager freedom of our thought in the divine presence is hampered, if not inhibited, by the suspicion that all creeds are a human impertinence; and the temper that abstains even from communion with God lest it should insult either His being or its own integrity is known to every modern soul.

And if the inner life even of those nurtured in the Church catholic and loyal to

its traditions is invaded by this dread, what shall we say of those without? Vigorous has been the reaction of our generation against creeds. Men have schooled themselves to a severe reserve of thought which has threatened at times to sweep all theologies away. The old Hamlet-sigh, "The rest is silence," is to many the only utterance, when, gazing past life's brief, sad, perplexing drama, they peer into the shadows beyond. The faith which has serenely claimed to penetrate these infinite shadows seems to them puerile when not arrogant. If, in times of inward stress, they indulge themselves in vague emotions, in impulsive crying on Mystery to save, the folly of such moments finds full compensation and correction in the sharp self-contempt of more intellectual moods. Perhaps, if it be indeed true that the human soul is made for adoration, there may be more of the element of personal worship than men recognize in the

enthusiastic reverence with which they contemplate the Secret of Life and Force; but such an element is unconscious. From the religion of the future, so runs a common feeling, all attempt at formula, definition, creed, must be abandoned, and awe must take the place of love.

Does this awe of the Unknowable, this Religion of the Unknown, offer food before untasted to the soul of man? Is it new or strange? Turn to the Book which defines the Infinite at times with most audacious assurance, which is repudiated with sharpest decision by bare scientific thought. There are ancient words antedating by many a generation the discoveries of modern agnostic science which seem to possess much the same ring. Less purely scientific because couched in the passion-fraught language of poetry, there yet rules behind the glow of their imagery a like reverent severity of thought. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find

out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" "He made darkness His secret place." "Clouds and darkness are round about Him." "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him."

If such phrases abound in the Old Testament, they are not lacking in the New. "No man hath seen God at any time," is the assertion of the most dogmatic of gospels. There is a book placed last in our Bibles, as the Apocalypse, the Revelation, *par excellence*, of the divine. At the very beginning is heard a Voice proclaiming, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, which is and which was and

which is to come, the Almighty." Did the modern scientist model upon these words his statement of "an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed"? If so, he omitted nothing. In the presence of this Energy, science tells us that we abide. In the presence of the Alpha and the Omega, the Almighty, the seer of Patmos tells us that the living creation abides and worships. And its chant rises forever, with no rest day and night, while in the liturgy joins the race of men, casting down their insignia of dominion: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, which was and which is and which is to come." Yet here must we pause; for the creation, passing beyond the self-announcement of the Eternal, hails it as Holy—a step far greater than any sanctioned by the modern scientific mind.

The confession of the inscrutable mystery of the divine nature, the abnegation

of all human sovereignty, the consciousness of the abyss between the Eternal and the creature of a day—these are the first conditions of the spirit of worship; they are the primary postulates of all theism, and hence of all Christianity.

Of all Christianity, not of all theology. Too often, throughout Christian history, theologians have neglected their solemn warning. Religious wars, in act and thought, have followed. Yielding to temptation, they have sought to define the Infinite, to put God in a formula. They have their reward. The formulæ "make themselves air." The Infinite can be expressed under no human terms; and the next generation rejects, it may be with relief, it may be with strife and pain, the efforts of its predecessors.

"Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

A spiritual religion must ever find its very source and spring in the recognition of the solemn abyss of unknown being that surrounds our little life. The words "Eternal" and "Infinite" imply by their very negations a Something incomprehensible to thought, alien to the nature of man, and because alien hailed as divine. No words of the scientist, no visions of far-darting speculation, can increase the humility with which the Christian recognizes his own ignorance, the reverence with which he prostrates himself before the majesty of infinite life and infinite law. Still he who seeks to behold the glory of God must be hidden in the cleft of the rock, and rejoice if a glimpse of a fleeting garment is vouchsafed him. The assumption of the agnostic is the essential condition of the worship of the theist. Were it not so, humility would be lost in arrogance and faith in sight.

Scientific thought has no new element

of inspiration to offer human life. Nor, indeed, does it claim to have. Rather, it claims to reject the spurious and the transitory and to retain that one permanent factor which can never be shaken by the progress of knowledge or the clash of theologies. Its glory is its simplicity.

A simple faith! It is always the cry of the denier. Protestant hurls it at Catholic; theist at Protestant; and the advocate of simple morality flings it at theist in due turn. One would think, to hear the common phrase, that simplicity was the first requisite of religion, and that any creed which can be challenged must be false.

Yet as matter of fact the simplicity won by intellectual negation has never held the world. Theorists and thinkers may feed themselves on abstractions; men and women demand facts. And the more nearly the alleged facts—or truths—of faith meet the known and complex facts of experience the swifter is the response of

the soul. Thus it is the faith that is familiar rather than the faith that is empty which appeals to humble folk and meets with ready understanding and swift assent. The peasant woman will grasp by intuition the full Catholic faith with all its intricacy and detail; for she finds in her own nature that which leaps to meet every assertion and welcomes every claim. She rests bewildered in the presence of theism, of a religion vague and broad. In truth, there are two kinds of simplicity: one at the beginning, one at the end; that of structure not begun, that of structure perfected. The amœba is simple in the first sense, the human body in the second. "From the homogeneous to the heterogeneous" the scientist tells us that evolution moves. Is its law to be disregarded in religion alone, and that faith to be highest and purest which is most amorphous? If so, the Religion of the Unknowable will satisfy our souls.

But it does not satisfy them; it makes no general appeal. We have eloquent and noble words, ringing with a kind of triumph, inspired by the thought of the vastness of the world and our own ignorance; we have more frequent expressions of passionate sorrow in the thought of a Father loved and lost. "Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none," cries Shelley exultant; but Clough, in later days, mourns bitterly: "Eat, drink, and die, for we are souls bereaved." And bereaved indeed the vague contemplation of Mystery leaves us.

"Mr. Spencer's Unknowable," writes a clever critic, "may truthfully enough be expressed by the algebraic formula x^n. The suffering world comes to the scientific philosopher waiting to be consoled, and he says, 'Think on the Unknowable.' Where two or three are gathered together to worship it, there may the algebraic formula suffice to give form to their emotions; they may be heard to profess their un-

wearying belief in x^n even, if no weak brother of ritualistic tendencies be heard to cry, 'O x^n, love us, help us, make us one with Thee.'"

The critic hints the truth. In the hour of pain, danger, death, can any one think on the Unknowable? Can Mystery redeem? Shall we plunge our faith, our hope, our adoration into this blank nescience which envelops our pitiful humanity, and expect them to return aglow with hope, vital with courage? Such faith, if faith it can be called, meets one only of the requisites of the soul—the need to abase itself; the correlative need—to exalt itself, need so cogent if man is to act—it leaves untouched. It offers neither stimulus to effort, standard for conduct, nor strength in failure. Can a religion devoid of all these elements satisfy the race that is to be? The first word of the Almighty in the Apocalypse corresponds, indeed, exactly to the admission of

science; but the cry of worship even at first transcends it. The book unfolds its mystic sequence of the history of man as seen in the Spirit, and the great antiphon of worship sounds down the ages, reëchoed at each crisis of the human tale. As taken up again and again, it throbs each time with new knowledge. "Worthy art Thou," cry the elders, "our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for Thou didst create all things, and *because of Thy will* they were, and were created." Creative Force not only works, but wills. Later comes the chant of the great multitude—white-robed palm-bearers; and they, coming out of great tribulation, from all peoples and tribes and tongues, give praise to a God who saves. Finally comes a voice from heaven as of many waters, of thunder, of harpers playing on their harps; but this "new song" of those purchased out of the earth no man may understand, for it hath not

entered into the heart of man to conceive the revelations of the Infinite Force which await souls perfected. At the end the Almighty speaks once more, and He saith, "Behold, I make all things new. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son." That which sufficed for creation shall suffice also for renewal, and the man who overcomes in the spiritual struggle of existence shall inherit the very nature of a Power no longer unknowable or unknown. The first word of God in the Apocalypse is the true and scientific starting-point for faith; must we hail the last as delusion?

IV.

THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

For each man of all men is God, but God is the fruit of
the whole;
Indivisible spirit and blood, indiscernible body and soul.

. . . . . .

O God with the world inwound, whose clay to his foot-
sole clings,

. . . . . .

Glory to Man in the highest, for man is master of things.

A. C. SWINBURNE.

Raise Thou the arms of endless intercession,
Jesus, divinest when Thou most art man.

F. W. H. MYERS.

IV.

THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

SHARP and unsparing is the criticism on the Religion of the Unknowable quoted in the last chapter. The author might be a priest, nurtured on the most full and definite "forms" ever evolved as "food of faith." He is, as it happens, Mr. Frederic Harrison, champion of the Religion of Humanity, chief exponent of Positivism in England.

Harrison is as profoundly agnostic as Spencer. He too, also denying that a divine Spirit can ever be known by us, asserts that in ultimate analysis the life of sacrifice and aspiration cannot be ascertained to have other than a physical basis. He too rules out, not by argument, but by assumption, the soul, immortality, God.

Yet his repudiation of the scientific substitute for religion is scathing and scornful —more scathing, more scornful, perhaps, than a follower of the Lord of Peace and Meekness would allow himself to express.

For the Positivists, and with them many others, mark a phase in the reaction from Christianity precisely the reverse of that marked by Spencer. While one school of agnostic thought criticizes the definiteness of the Christian faith, another criticizes its mysticism. One school demands that religion exclude everything but the sentiment of mystery; another that it rule out mystery altogether, as the foe to light, and evolve its being from the contemplation of known fact.

In the recognition of the dark grandeur of Force there is no response to the human cry, no appeal for action or service. Because it leaves the soul still empty its votaries are very limited. The great current of agnostic consciousness has set in

another direction, away from the mysterious, the vast, and the vague, toward the clear, the familiar, and the human. Mankind becomes the center of its thought, and practically, if not avowedly, the object of its religion. Positivism is one phase, and that the smallest, of the wide tendency to concentrate all passion and devotion on the service of men; one phase of the Religion of Humanity, which during the last half-century has expected, and at times almost appeared, to supplant the religion of Christ. But it is a phase curiously interesting because fully aware of its own nature, and trying to shape for itself an organic, semichurchly structure, while most agnostics are pure individualists, content to let attitude take the place of confession of faith. The Positivists, indeed, do not like to be called agnostic. "The Positivist answer to the theological problem," says Harrison, "is of course the same as the agnostic answer;" but negation

is only the starting-point which shall lead to the "Positive" faith. They have felt the need of the century, the aching hunger of the soul. They accept the dictum of science, unknown and known, no mediator between. But the solution of the scientist they discard. To fling their faith, their love, their service into a dark blank is not only cold, but unpractical. Another solution remains, another possible answer to the hunger of the soul. God is lost to us, the Unknowable is useless. Let us take what remains—the Known. Starting on this basis, Auguste Comte built up an immense system which was to include all knowledge and conduct, and which found substance and center in the cry, "Worship humanity; exalt the race-ideal."

It was in the second quarter of the century that Comte published his Bible, the "Philosophie Positive." He starts with assumption and classification. Historical progress he divides into three

stages: the theological, when man worshiped a supposed divine Being or beings and interpreted life in the light of such worship; the metaphysical, when, convinced of the folly of belief in God, man still seeks to pierce the veil of phenomena, to apprehend causes, and to reach absolute truth; finally, the positive, when, realizing the futility of the search for cause, man abandons speculation and confines himself within the limits of fact. Every science, says Comte, passes through these three phases. The science of religion, slowest because greatest of all, is only just emerging from the second or metaphysical stage —nay, some shreds of the old theology yet cling about it in feeble minds. To shake these off, to escape also from thought of abstractions, to force man to a solid basis—here is the duty of the future, the inspiration of the enlightened mind.

And let it not be supposed that the new religion was to be devoid of its ardent

emotions, its ritual even. Comte devised for it a cult elaborate as that of the Roman Catholic Church, a cult of altars, lights, vestments, and sacred signs, with a calendar of saints. A central symbol, a woman of thirty with a child in her arms, was to replace the Madonna. Women, indeed, through whom runs the sacred river of life, were chiefly to be worshiped; for they stood as types of all humanity, that greatest of known facts. Positivism in England has known a very definite though limited development. Already there has been a split in the ranks; the ritualistic brethren now worship in a church where an adaptation of the Anglican liturgy is in use and prayers ascend to "holy Humanity"; while the more hard-headed members of the party—we might perhaps add, those endued with a sense of humor—continue to meet in a hall adorned with busts of great men, and to satisfy their devout impulses with lectures on popular history.

But far more important than the existence of Positivists as a sect is the large and indefinable extent to which their faith has spread as an attitude. It has taken possession of many of the most intelligent natures of the century. Its ardent plea for the service of our kind in the brief time that elapses before we go forth into the great darkness; its faith in the influence which survives us as our only immortality; its yearning love—love touched with pity—for its lame divinity, man—all these give to it a strange, sad beauty, like the last gleam of dying day in a wide twilight sky. John Stuart Mill was an admirer and follower of Comte. G. H. Lewes and his great companion, George Eliot, were inspired and suffused by the highest Positivist spirit. To come to later times and a different type, it is hardly conceivable that the strong and terrible genius of Zola should have penned the pages of "Docteur Pascal" without reference, definite even if

unconscious, to the tenets of Comte. Yet it would be unfair to choose Zola as a typical exponent of Positivism. For one philosopher who would feel his awe in the presence of the Unknowable an adequate substitute for the sweet human faith of Christ, fifty men and women seize on a religion which at least enjoins on them, as the chief privilege of life, devotion to their fellow-beings. Those who have lost God will try forever to fill His place with man. So it comes to pass that the Religion of Humanity has become almost a cant phrase among us, and expresses itself in definite forms, shifting year by year. Societies of Ethical Culture, repudiating, for reasons invisible to the outsider, connection with the Positivists, yet hold tenets apparently similar, and seek by practical ritual in settlements and guilds among the poor to embody their tenets in ways in which the Christian church may well be glad to join. Mean-

while countless wanderers in spirit, outside of societies or church, seek in cherishing faith in the future of the race the chief satisfaction to their souls. Humanitarian! The ugly word has become in these latter days a battle-cry of progress and of hope.

The advocates of this position, as they think of Christianity, are especially imbued with the sense that they have risen higher. And their great plea is that of an ethical superiority. They say much of the selfishness of the Christian scheme, with its claim of personal immortality, its emphasis on individual salvation. "We shall have a glorious religion," cried Shelley to Leigh Hunt long ago, in the shade of the cathedral of Pisa, "when charity and not faith is made its basis." To nourish the soul on illusions—how weak! To concentrate thought upon itself—how dangerous! Far truer to abandon the desire to know; far nobler, renouncing thought of the Beyond, to center life and love on others!

So shall unselfishness and honesty alike be better preserved, and altruistic virtues replace the religion of egotism.

It is hard to admit this charge of selfishness, brought against Christianity by those who would make the honor and care for men the center of life. The spiritual wisdom of the Church Catholic has taught, indeed, the supreme importance of personal holiness. To this end she has enjoined keen self-searching; penitence, confession, reparation; the yearning of the soul toward personal communion with the living God. But in any agnostic community these things or their equivalent must find place. Social morals must always be founded on individual virtue. To attain this virtue man must examine himself straitly, must know the agony of self-abasement, must recognize his failures, and must seek inspiration in the arduous struggle through placing his own life beside the highest he knows. The drama

of the inner life must be eternal, whether that drama pass beneath a cloud earth-born or open to the spiritual heavens.

Nor can the taint of selfishness be affixed to the Christian faith in immortality. From the time of George Eliot, people who earnestly plead for a religion centered in influence on others have preferred the charge. Fools and blind, not to see that this faith, as any other, becomes charged with selfish or unselfish passion according to the nature that holds it—can minister to an individualist craving or can satisfy the yearning cry for the good of the entire race. Unselfishness inheres in character, not creed. I, sound in mind and body, to whom nature, art, love, action, have opened their full glory; I, the heir of the ages, living a life of peaceful energy, with spirit attuned to catch the faintest notes of the earth-music—what claim have I on immortality? I verily have lived; when my time comes to pass

into the shadow I may lay life aside, content, or, if not content, at least knowing that the great universe has given me a fair share of its inheritance. But these my brothers, stunted of body, sordid of heart, lethargic of brain—these who live, unconsciously, in torment, pursued by the furies of physical want and of inherited vice—for these, what compensation? How shall the great Law of the universe be justified for having made them? How, indeed, unless there is a new earth beyond these troubled shores for the meek to inherit; unless, in a life to come, peace, light, purity, fullness of life such as they never knew below, await them? Not for ourselves, the rich in this world's goods of comfort, art, and thought; not for ourselves, but for these, the oppressed of the earth, we demand from Justice immortality.

Nor, as a matter of social morality, can we find anything new in the much-vaunted gospel of service. The modern Church,

indeed, intent upon theologies sometimes fantastic, was from the first of the century false to the social passion. It is now at last responding, though as yet faintly, to the social renascence in which we live. But, in the teaching of her Master, the ethical and social commands of the Sermon on the Mount preceded by at least a year the mystic dogma of the first eucharist; and it was only after long training in the casting out of demons and in works of temporal mercy that the disciples were allowed to hear the mighty word, "I and My Father are one." The law unfolded by Christ mounts upward, indeed, in crest after crest of moral and spiritual grandeur. He begins by repudiating the law of negative justice so sternly set forth in the Old Testament—"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth;" that law which is still the avowed—alas! too often the violated—canon of modern trade. He advances at once to the higher, positive

laws of reciprocity and non-resistance: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them." "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you." Still this law holds before us a distant ideal, which we struggle to attain as individuals and ignore as a community. But the Master does not pause, or pauses only that a practical training may reveal the awful scope of His commands to His loving but foolish disciples. Then, in the intimacy, familiar yet mystical, of His last hour on earth with those whom He has just for the first time called His friends, He lifts them at last to a yet nobler height, and describes to them the perfect social law, the law of sacrifice: "This is My commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you." Then, going forth into the

night, He manifests in act what He has taught in word, and the social gospel is revealed. However falteringly, His Church has followed Him. No height can be reached by the followers of a modern social morality which has not been trodden before by Christian feet.

Ethically we can find no point in which the Religion of Humanity transcends the religion of Christ. How is it spiritually?

The worship of humanity! Sad and puzzling the thought, as we contemplate it, becomes. Live for a while, as many of us have lived, in the slums of a modern city, among the great majority; nay, walk for one long evening through the Bowery in New York—or, indeed, Fifth Avenue will do as well—and watch the faces streaming by: faces dull, sodden, unbeautiful, rarely criminal, but never ideal. Gather them into one composite vision; is it this pitiful image that is offered for our god?

Or suppose, without asking whether we have the logical right, we put aside the average. Concentrate thought upon the best and noblest of the race through its long history—the leaders of mankind, heroes, poets, statesmen, martyrs. Fuse their best into one image, still thinking of this image as the object of religion, and our first instinct, our surging emotion, is that of a great pity. Pity is noble and sweet; but it is a strange religion which is driven at the very heart of faith to replace worship by compassion.

Where, indeed, is scope for adoration if, to satisfy the religious instinct, we turn to man alone? Religion demands an object of worship no less than a standard of conduct and a comforter in pain. Can I pray to humanity? Will its ears be open unto my supplications, accept my thanksgiving, purify my will? Will it discipline me to obedience? Alas! where may its commands be learned? For many-tongued it

is, and changing as the wind. Can it comfort me in the hour of anguish?

> "That loss is common would not make
> My own less bitter, rather more,"

is the cry of the high-minded soul. Can I serve humanity? Yes; this indeed, this alone; but it is service rendered to a need below us, not to a glory enthroned above, and such service is not freedom.

"Be it so," writes the humanitarian; "but what more, or what better, have we? If this is not enough it is at least all that men and women on earth can possess." There is but one alternative—an Unknowable Somewhat, which cannot be presented in terms of consciousness, to which the words "emotion," "will," "intelligence," cannot be applied, yet which stands in place of the Creator; or a known human race, faulty if you will, stupid without doubt, but able at least to profit by your devotion. Choose ye which ye will serve;

for other God than these the enlightened intellect of man, standing on the vantage-ground won by the wisdom of the ages, declares that there is none.

The old assumption! And yet the assertion of at-one-ment has been made, the revelation of the Divine has been given.

We cannot even think the Unknowable, far less love it. And the object of religion —so proclaims the positive temper fostered by science itself—must be something that can be known and loved; must, therefore, share our nature. We seek a God and we find him; our God must be Man.

Yet the attempt is pitiful, to make a divinity out of men as we see them around us and in history—feeble, stupid, failing of perfection at their best. And the attempt is useless; for men, taken collectively, can afford neither standard of conduct nor strength in pain.

But, looking back through history, we find one Figure on which the eyes of all

the generations have been fixed. Alone among all the sons of earth it has borne their scrutiny and yet appears in purity unsullied, in wisdom supreme. A perfect standard of conduct was given to the world forever in the person of Jesus Christ. Verily the Son of man, He may be known by men; and there is probably no fact in nature or history so sharply distinct in the general consciousness to-day as that of His personality. But in Him humanity loses its confusion, variableness, and failings, and is uplifted into perfect unity, holiness, and strength. Gathering up into Himself the fullness of all men, He is the Race-ideal, the perfect archetype. Not, as the Catholic faith has always held, *a man*—one unit in the multitudinous throngs of human lives—but Man essential, Man eternal, He appears as the Master of the race, the Vine of which all are branches, the Lord who draws to Himself with irresistible power not only the wor-

shipful service, but the very being of men. Those who know Him give their allegiance to no mere stream of life, passing through countless forms, but to one ever-living Lord.

And in the Church, the mystical body of Christ, we have a yet further extension of the idea for which the lover of humanity cries. For the Church, both normally and ideally, includes the entire human race; even now, in a world invaded by sin and failure, it is the representative of all, the earnest of the society to be. It not only claims our service, but commands our reverence; for, made up as it is of faulty and distorted people, it yet reaches up into a higher region, and witnesses to perfection, through its organic and sacramental union with a Head in whom are centered holiness, wisdom, authority. The intense and ardent devotion to "holy Humanity" sounds strained and unreal from the lips of the Positivist; it has real meaning, a

meaning which yet contradicts in no wise superficial and obvious facts, on the lips of the Christian. Christ in history and in His Church may well be the center of the souls of men. Thus does the Christian faith free from impurity and fulfil in glory the demand for an object of worship which can be known, loved, and served.

The cravings of the Religion of Humanity are met in the religion of Christ; how about the limitations? Does Christianity join in the hatred of mystery, in the refusal to let thought or imagination dwell on the Infinite Unknown?

Not so. For in Him who is the firstborn of every creature, we behold the image of the invisible God. Man must worship mystery, exclaims the scientist. Man must worship man, is the rejoinder of practical thought. And the two statements find union and great harmony in a few quiet words written many a century ago, which tell us, "No man hath seen

God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

The mystery of Infinite Power is not, in the Christian faith, denied, but revealed, and revealed that men may adore. "The fear of the Lord" is the first element of worship; but this fear is made luminous with love. The Eternal Force behind phenomena Spencer refuses to call personal. "And I do so," he says, "because it is not less than personal, but more." With every word the Christian agrees. God must be more than personal: does He not comprehend the universe? Personality, whatever the word may mean—consciousness, love, will—must be included within His being: do they not flow forth from Him into the nature of man? Whence should man derive consciousness, if consciousness there be none in the Creative Force which is the source of his being? But this Power, not less than personal, but more—how much more may

be known to the denizens of other worlds than ours—is revealed to us, in the aspect it bears to humanity, in Him who emptied Himself of His glory, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man. Thus revealed, the Eternal is manifest to us, not as force, not as law, but as the Father. Thus are human and divine made at one; thus is the Infinite revealed to the finite; thus is crossed that vast and sundering gulf which seems to the man of pure science, overwhelmed by the sense of distance, impassable not only to the reason, but to the imagination of man. In the first fourteen verses of the Gospel according to St. John we have the full account of a spiritual evolution, of the creation of the universe, through a divine Reason shining unrecognized at first in the darkness of inorganic being, yet illumining all; gradually recognized as human consciousness appears; manifesting itself at last under a form knowable to men; and exalting those who

respond with power to become full partakers of infinite and eternal life. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by Him. . . . And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not. . . . There was the true Light, which lighteth every man, coming into the world. . . . As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." Here is the satisfaction of all thought; here the demands of the Religion of Mystery and the Religion of Morality are met and fused. Here, rejecting their negations, the positive assertions of each are seen to be essential and rightful elements of the faith that is eternal.

V.

THE RELIGION OF MORALITY.

The one Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
And bursting in its beauty and its might
From trees and beasts and men into the heavens' light.

SHELLEY, *Adonais.*

Come, thou Holy Spirit, come,
And from thy celestial home
Shed a ray of light divine.
Come, thou Father of the poor,
Come, thou Source of all our store,
Come, within our bosoms shine.

Ancient Hymn.

V.

THE RELIGION OF MORALITY.

MYSTERY and man. Here, then, are the substitutes which we have so far found offered for the old faith in the Son, full of grace and truth, leading us to the Father of our spirits. There is yet one more faith in which lost minds, lost hearts, have sought to take refuge from the cold of a godless world. "There is no God; let us worship a mystery," says Spencer. "There is no God; let us worship humanity," says the Positivist. "There is no God; let us worship a tendency," says the man of culture.

The phases of agnostic thought which we have been considering can never satisfy. They are too severe. In politics, art,

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religion, there are always a few rigorous souls who know where they belong and where they do not; black to them excludes white, white has nothing in common with black. But the majority are neither rigorous nor, perhaps, logical. The sensitive people, too intensely alive; the sluggish people, only half alive; the critical people, whose life is absorbed in the instinct to observe—all these hate to take sides. Their effort is to palliate and retain; their impulse, compromise.

So it happens that few people, perhaps, repudiate Christianity thoroughly. The exultant antagonism of Huxley or Ingersoll is very rare; the sweeping and contemptuous denial of the older scientific agnosticism or of the followers of Comte is becoming constantly rarer. Christianity is less often than ten years ago, even, treated as an exhausted force. Its literature, its ethics, its ideals, indeed, like gentle and pure rills of mountain water,

the waters of regeneration, have worn for themselves in the rocky nature of man channels which cannot readily be abandoned or forgotten, though in drought the streams are dry. We live in a society which, though hardly Christianized in fact, is deeply Christianized in theory. Our art, speculation, conduct, are shaped by influences wholly absent from that pagan civilization which was in some respects so much fairer than our own. Our convictions may change and become de-Christianized; but the intangible yet controlling sentiments which these convictions have brought with them, and which determine the quality of life as undertones determine the quality of a musical instrument—these cannot perish at once.

Thus hosts of people hold to the past with tenderness, even when they cannot hold to it with faith. They feel the loftiness of Christian passion, the worth and power of Christian organization. Why

relinquish all this? Why renounce forms hallowed by the prayers of generations, entwined with the fibers of our deepest inherited life? Why not cling to the old even while we spring to the new?

The exponents of such an attitude are all around us. They use our terms, sympathize with our ideals, join sometimes in our worship, claim membership in our churches. We cannot live earnestly or broadly without meeting them at every turn. The children of the scientific movement, they have reacted from it with their hearts, but not with their minds. The exhilaration of denial has died away, and their impulse is constructive. Far from challenging the faith of their fathers, they claim that in essentials it is still their own. The sacredness of the past is potent with them, and organic connection with the Christian Church, no less than the atmosphere of Christian sentiment, is their most cherished heritage.

The revolutionary passion of revolt emanated chiefly from France; the modern theories of science were identified with an English school of thought. But this latest and most subtly vital of all phases of agnostic thought derives tone and character, in a double sense, from Germany. The way was prepared for it by the Hegelian philosophy, with its constant tendency to place the idea above the fact; and this impulse of pure transcendentalism was reinforced by the resultant school of theological criticism, with its fierce yet confident challenge of the authenticity of the Christian documents. The awakening of the historic sense, indeed, potent in secular tracts, could not be expected to spare Christianity; the spirit which respects and cherishes the past must of necessity analyze it also. Dread of the result of destructive analysis was removed from men thoroughly trained by idealist philosophy to believe

> "It matters nothing for the name,
> So the idea be left the same."

And the result was the appearance of critics like Keim or Holtzmann, who do their best to demolish the historical basis of Christianity, while professing and experiencing most exalted reverence for the Christian faith.

Browning, the poet so keenly alive to all contemporary thought-movements, has given us in his "Christmas Eve" the most concise study and summary of a thinker of this type. The soul, which is to learn that love is supreme whether manifest through vulgarity, formalism, or critical scholarship, is transported from the hideous dissenting chapel to the glory of the midnight mass at St. Peter's, and thence to the lecture-desk at Göttingen, where the "sallow, virgin-minded, studious" professor is demolishing the myth of Christ—

> "Whether 'twere best to opine Christ was,
> Or never was at all, or whether
> He was, and was not, both together."

The professor's discourse must be read to be appreciated. Denying facts and words of the gospel record, he yet, when the destructive work is at an end, bids his hearers give to the story of Christ their supreme reverence—

> " Which, though it meant
> Something entirely different
> From all that those who only heard it,
> In their simplicity, thought and averred it,
> Had yet a meaning quite as respectable."

Then breaks forth in a rush the poet's half-indignant, half-impatient, amused flood of comment:

> " Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic
> When papist struggles with dissenter. . . .
> But the critic leaves no air to poison;
> Pumps out, with ruthless ingenuity,
> Atom by atom, and leaves you—vacuity.
> Thus much of Christ does he reject?
> And what retain? His intellect?
> What is it I must reverence duly?
> Poor intellect for worship, truly,
> Which tells me simply what was told
> (If mere morality, bereft
> Of the God in Christ, be all that's left)
> Elsewhere by voices manifold,
> With this advantage, that the stater

Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, He the sage and humble
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity,
But how does blame evade it?
Have Wisdom's words no more felicity?

. . . . .

Morality to the uttermost,
Supreme in Christ, as we all confess,
Why need we prove, would avail no jot
To make Him God, if God He were not?
What is the point where Himself lays stress?
Does the precept run, 'Believe in good,
In justice, truth, now understood
For the first time'?—or, 'Believe in Me,
Who lived and died, yet essentially
Am Lord of Life'?"

Finally, Browning sums up the critic's position and his own comment:

"'Go home, and venerate the myth
I thus have experimented with—
This man, continue to adore Him
Rather than all who went before Him
And all who ever followed after.'
Surely for this I may praise you, my brother.
Will you take the praise in tears or laughter?

. . . . .

Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,
'Christian'—abhor the Deist's pravity.
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity

Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse,
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them."

From Germany to England the thought-journey is long. Before 1860 a reaction had set in on the Continent toward admitting more and more of an historic basis to the gospel story, and a nearer approach of the narrative to the events described. Strauss, in his second "Life of Jesus," abandons the purely mythical theory of the first "Life" in favor of an historic though shadowy figure. Thus in the land of their origin the mythical and idealist theories soon underwent modification; but in 1880 the theory-wave, in its first fullness, was still affecting England. It was in vain, for many, that churchmen and theologians tried to stay its force. The criticism of the Christian documents suggested a host of new doubts and questions, which coincided only too readily with the *a priori* difficulties in the way of faith presented

by scientific speculation. A transcendental philosophy, hinting that the spiritual truths of Christianity were independent of historic fact, finished the work; and the agnostic position in its latest phase was thoroughly matured. It has reached classes whom the previous course of the movement of denial had never wholly won—people with a literary sense, which the scientists have not; people with a sense of humor, which the Positivists have not; and the many fine, rare, delicate spirits who are exclusively transcendentalist and indifferent to crude questions of fact.

The final agnostic attitude, thus wide in its appeal, has permeated thought rather than defined itself into a school. The man who did most to spread it, and who was himself its most finished exponent, was doubtless Matthew Arnold. Arnold, indeed, more French than German in temperament, mocks German critics as sharply as Anglican bishops. A free-lance, he

fights under no banner; yet it is obvious enough, to any one who reads his books as a whole, how largely he was formed by the thought he despises.

One of the most significant, though not one of the greatest figures of the century, Arnold tempts us to linger. A man of exquisite culture, nurtured in strictest Christian tradition, he clung devotedly to Christian sentiment; yet Christianity, on its supernatural side, had become to him an irrevocable dream. It is quite wrong to speak as if Arnold had been an antagonist to Christianity, an iconoclast thirsting for destruction. Nothing is clearer than that his conscious aim was constructive. He believed that Christianity contained elements inestimably precious; that the age-thought, crudely Philistine, was in danger of letting these elements go and impoverishing life forever. He sought to distinguish the transitory from the enduring, and to lead men to the recognition of

that in the teachings of Christ which could never die. He himself tells us that while in England his books were viewed as a dangerous onslaught on Christianity, critics on the Continent marveled that a man of intelligence should waste his time in the fatuous and strange effort to discover elements of permanence in an outworn faith. Deep love and tender reverence are visible in all Arnold's treatment of the New Testament, love and reverence all the more striking when compared with the flippancy of his favorite tone toward theology and church dignitaries. This exalted religious sentiment makes distinctions difficult, and, in a very bewildering world, bewilders us yet more. To a man of his type, remarkable less for logical acumen than for keen literary sensitiveness, the value of Church and Bible is twofold—their ministry to emotion and their guidance to a moral life. These elements he endeavors to preserve intact, untwining from them,

gently or rudely as the case may be, the intellectual conceptions and definite doctrines which were once supposed to bear to emotion and maxim the relation of a flower to its perfume. Arnold would keep the aroma; but he ruthlessly flings the flower away. Rejecting scornfully, from the idea of God, the personal and all which pure reason cannot recognize, he keeps a tendency that makes for righteousness. He considers the person of Christ, and, passing as unworthy of notice the Catholic faith of the Godhead manifest in perfect manhood, he presents to us the Jewish mystic, wise with the wisdom of the heart, instinct with a sweet reasonableness. Of the glorious scope of the New Testament commands and promises to the believing soul, he leaves us the method of inwardness, the secret of self-renunciation. And having thus "defecated," as has well been said, "the conception of religion to a mere transparency," he bids us retain in

fullness our old passion of worship; directing it no longer to the God adored by our fathers, but to a tendency toward righteousness. "Morality touched by emotion" becomes our religion, and a "Something not ourselves" becomes our God.

On the whole, Arnold defines clearly enough the amount of intellectual conviction which underlies much Christian phraseology. An uneasy tendency is abroad to dematerialize religion, as it were, to escape from the troublesome connection with historical and concrete fact; to relinquish everything susceptible of challenge, and to take refuge in abstractions. The very strength of the religious emotion, in a way, aids this tendency. Spiritual passion is eternal in the soul; but the force of feeling may at times be self-sufficing and veil by its very intensity the absence of definite object. Such an attitude is, as a rule, happy. No longer pursued by the sense of loss or haunted by regrets, it is

complacent and peaceful. It offers a compromise which retains the comfort of use and wont while escaping strenuous demands on thought. Many people, more marked by devoutness and sympathy than by clearness of thought, and impressed by the wideness of truth, fail to see the distinction between this attitude and the attitude of the Church.

Yet the distinction is absolute. The Church is the guardian of what her foes call dogma and she calls truth; that is, of belief in central definite and objective facts. Only secondarily and as result is she the guardian of morals or the inspirer of feeling. Those who deny a God with whom intercourse is possible as with a friend, an immortality in which man may find release, those who restrict our inspiration to powers and laws evolved in human experience, these are as truly agnostic as the most virulent foe of Christ and the Church. Whatever delicate sym-

pathy they may have for the exquisite ethics of Christianity, however they may cherish and adopt Christian sentiments and terms, they differ from other schools of agnostic thought only in surrounding their negations with the glamour of finer feeling and a more subtle sense of duty.

This attitude is a witness to the might of Christianity; but it is a sorrowful witness. One can hardly refrain from entering a protest against, not its spirit, but its method. The protest would be launched, not in the name of Christian dogma nor of moral consistency, but of intellectual honesty. For surely such an attitude tends toward what George Eliot, in "Theophrastus Such," calls "debasing the currency." Arnold rebukes over-scrupulousness; but in truth it is well-nigh impossible to become over-scrupulous in our medium of intellectual exchange. It is hard enough to understand one another in this bewildering and sorrowful world. We live

amidst the confusion of tongues, and no man can be sure that he speaks the same language as his fellows. That we behold the same objects in the physical world is matter of pure conjecture; that we hold the same conviction in the inner world of mind is an hypothesis doubly removed from demonstration. Is it not, then, unwise to destroy the little unity that we have in our means of interchange; to take words which have already gained a vital and definite meaning through long use and wont, so that everybody approximately understands them, and to insist on using them in a quite new sense, retaining what they adumbrate, but rejecting what they signify? Yet surely this is what is done by people who speak of the living Christ as a name for the race-ideal, of the resurrection as signifying simply moral or spiritual regeneration, of God as a tendency that makes for righteousness. To mean an abstraction when one says "God" is

neither fair nor honest. Words are flesh as well as spirit. Try to strip away the flesh—historical implication, intellectual conviction—and the spirit, the emotional and moral power, becomes not only invisible, but unknowable. Let us at least keep the rough accuracy that comes from meaning by words what our fathers meant, what simple people mean, what the words themselves, taken at their face-value, seem to say. If we are to have a new religion, let us have a language for a new religion. If our religion consists of the moral sentiment of the old, minus its convictions, let us not use language which was assuredly meant to imply the fact first and the feeling only by inference. Let us avoid using as poetry—Arnold's pet illustration—what was meant as science. Stern scrupulousness in speech is our only hope of understanding one another at all or making real progress. If our faith is true and high it

ought to be quite capable of engendering a new poetry of its own. To borrow is evidence of weakness.

Yet an attitude in which rare spirits find repose cannot be founded on illusion. What is it, then, in this religion of abstractions which supports the soul?

It is the recognition of that tendency to righteousness which operates, mighty but unseen, through all the course of human history, bending men's hearts to itself to fulfil the counsels of the Eternal. This school of thought cares not, with the scientist, to fix its eyes on the abyss, the wide space-gulf behind visible nature. Nor does it, with the pure lover of humanity, Positivist or other, seek to center the religious passion on a personal, concrete race of men. Personality it abhors, indeed, as if the very term savored of limitation. It is an impulse of high culture, at times, to withdraw from fellowship with men into a solitude of thought.

"The lofty peaks but to the stars are known,
But to the stars and the cold lunar beams;
Alone the sun arises, and alone
Spring the great streams."

The impulse which prevails toward men seems also to prevail in the thought of the Eternal; and men repudiate the personal with horror from their faith, as they escape it in their lives. But that which meditative thought finds most worthy of honor, that which stirs it to action and feeling, is the recognition of moral force. We perceive such force playing through human history; through all man's errors making for truth, through all sin for righteousness, through all vacillation sweeping steadily forward with irresistible might. In the individual it is the impulse which makes for inward purity and self-renouncement; in the community, for social righteousness; in the long sequence of human generations it manifests the wide and just workings of the moral law. It is this force, as revealed to the student of human experience,

which is to exact obedience and inspire strength.

Is there here any element of inspiration absent in Christianity? Is this recognition of a spiritual force molding destinies and encircling life, working outward from and through the conscience of men, a new revelation?

We saw how the religious instinct of the man of pure science, his mind concentrated on the natural order, led him to bow before the mystery surrounding nature, which he worshiped as the source of life; and we found this Infinite and Eternal Energy recognized with awful dread by the prophets of old as the God who hideth Himself, by the Christian seer as the Almighty, the Beginning and the End. Then, noting how the humanitarian finds an opposite religion in the service of his kind and the worship of the race-ideal, we saw that the satisfaction of the craving which led him back to man was found in the adoring ser-

vice of that Son of God who, incarnate in humanity, exalts the entire race to mystic union with Himself. We are confronting now a third phase of agnostic thought—a phase which loves to dwell, not on nature nor on men, but on the moral law. It recognizes, as the stimulus to devotion and ardor, an influence viewless as wind, unconfinable as water, kindling like flame, moving toward righteousness in society and in the soul.

What have we here but reverent recognition of the final doctrine of the Christian faith? "Let Thy loving Spirit," cried the psalmist long ago, "lead me forth into the land of righteousness." All through the Old Testament breathes the sense of a spiritual force, making for holiness. It moves at first upon the face of the waters. It is known supremely in the lives of men. They cannot escape it. Whither shall they flee, then, from its presence? Shaped and guided by its direction only could

they reach goodness. "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." It lifts them out of bondage into freedom. In its liberty alone could life be secure: "Stablish me with Thy free Spirit." Time goes on, and with clearer light the consciousness of this force becomes more distinct. It is hidden, universal, invisible, the very atmosphere of human life, yet manifest at times only. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, but thou canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." Those "born anew" in its might share its mysterious power, free of the world, uplifted into a higher region; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there," as the psalmist knew, "is liberty." It is essentially, with all its mystery, moral; its results are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance—an ideal of character suave yet austere, in which the gentle and bright joyousness of the Greek meets the high standard of

the Hebrew. Thus it works secretly in the conscience of each man, to purify, instruct, and guide; but, greater than the being of any one, it works in the collective soul, and is the universal power binding the human race in one, through all illusions of sin and failure making for an ideal not yet attained—"for through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness." Impersonal, it speaks not of itself, and may be known only in its workings; it shows unto us the things of Another, revealing the perfect Standard of conduct for which men cry aloud. This is the force, evident to any thoughtful eye, which perpetually convicts the world in respect of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. The Spirit of righteousness, it is also the Spirit of truth, the power which, bringing all things to remembrance, interprets the past and enables men to read the lessons of history. Revealing the past, it makes for the future, showing things to

come and guiding into all truth. It is, as it has been from the beginning and shall be for all time, the informing life of all spiritual and social evolution.

Here is the Catholic doctrine, in the very words of the ancient and dogmatic Book which the Church hold sacred. Where does it fail to cover the faith of the transcendentalist: the perception of a Power which may not be defined, making for righteousness; of spiritual force, mighty in nature, in history, and in the souls of men?

All through the century has been increasing the number of those who fear—with too much reason from the past history of religious thought—a crude anthropomorphism; who, dowered with deep spiritual intuition, shrink from limiting their perception of divine power within the thought of personality. This religious movement of revulsion has, however, known a distinct development. In its earlier phases (before, we may say, 1850),

those who revolted from the Church and flung aside the conception of a theological Deity found their chief inspiration and awe in contemplating divine life pervading nature. Philosophers and poets—Spinoza, Shelley, Emerson, to a great degree Carlyle—nourished their spiritual natures, widened their imaginative outlook, and prepared in advance the corrective for a purely materialistic conception of evolution, by their intuition of the one Spirit's plastic stress, sweeping through the dense physical world, imposing forms on all creation, and bursting, in sequence of cumulative glory, "through trees and beasts and men, into the heaven's light." This enraptured pantheism—emotion which mistook itself for philosophy—held an element of true inspiration which cannot die; but as time advanced another phase of thought became more appealing. Consciousness more and more passed from nature to center itself in man. Those who were not drawn

into the Christian reaction continue to deny or ignore personality in spiritual force; but they have turned to tracing the movement of that force in the moral rather than the natural world, in human history and experience rather than in the goings forth of the morning and the evening. We may correlate the pantheism of Emerson or Spinoza with the sense for the mystery of nature developed by the scientist; while the tendency-worship of Arnold has more in common with the love and reverence for men shown by the religion of humanity.

But, whether in earlier or later form, the recognition of spiritual force has for the Christian no new element. It is simply the intuition, vouchsafed to all who earnestly seek the light of nature, history, or the soul within, of the Holy Spirit of God. This Spirit, moving upon the waters at the creation, is immanent in the whole universe, a principle of beauty and of life

compelling matter to yield up divine secrets; but it abides most truly and most wondrously in the soul born anew to child-like faith; and, moving toward righteousness in the Church which has received its influence, slowly, surely, according to the working of mighty laws, evolves the society to be.

We may trace a wide distinction, however, between the pantheistic thought of the first and second half of the century; that which springs from the contemplation of nature is far less profoundly agnostic than that which springs from the contemplation of man. For to Shelley or to Emerson the spiritual force discerned within the workings of nature is generated apart from nature, and transcends the visible, material world. But to Arnold or the pure ethicist the mystic force which sways human destiny, the "tendency," the "Eternal," has no source outside the being of man. We may call it "not ourselves,"

but practically it has no existence for thought, apart from human consciousness. We say it "makes for righteousness"; but that very righteousness can be known to us from arbitrary inference alone. To the man for whom religion is morality touched with emotion God is simply the atmosphere of the human moral instinct, swayed by some great impulse till it becomes a wind, powerful to drive the wills of men forward on its current. Spiritual force is essentially self-created. It beareth witness of itself. "Such witness," said, long ago, One whose spiritual wisdom all thought delights supremely to honor—"such witness is not true."

Far different is the language familiar to Christian ears: "And I will pray the Father," says our Lord to the disciples, touched with wondering fear, "and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; . . . He abideth with you,

and shall be in you. . . . He shall guide you into all the truth: for He shall not speak from Himself; but what things soever He shall hear, these shall He speak: and He shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you."

Behind the spiritual influence visible in nature and in the minds of men Christianity puts the personal God, the Father, revealed in a perfect humanity, absolutely one with the divine. "*Because we are sons*," it says, "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, to hail Him, Father." Pantheism infused with morality is all around us. It recognizes a Spirit, invisible in its workings, secret, righteous, eternal; a Father and a Son it does not know. Meanwhile the Church makes steadily, as she has made throughout the ages, her confession of faith: "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and

the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets."

How often the doctrine has seemed strange, arbitrary, invented! But let it go; believe in a Spirit who proceeds from no Father and no Son, who has no source in absolute and loving Being, no relation to a Humanity manifest, once for all, as holy, and what certainty has life left? Where is a standard of conduct; where salvation from sin? Gone is the assurance of absolute right, gone the quiet certainty that a Spirit proceeding from such right, far above our wistful hypotheses, is guiding us into all truth. Vaguely the mists close upon us, and man is left shut in upon himself. Remove the doubt, repeat with joyous awe the Catholic confession, and the sunlight, not diffused, but direct, streams from the sun full upon our upturned brows. "For the Lord is the Spirit," says St. Paul.

VI.

THE RELIGION OF CHRIST.

O Luce eterna, che sola in te sidi,
Sola t'intendi, e, da te intelletta,
Ed intendente, te ami ed arridi !
  Quella circulazion, che sì concetta
Pareva in te, come luce reflesso,
Dagli occhi miei alquanto circonspetta,
  Dentro da sè, del suo colore istesso,
Mi parve pinta della nostra effige,
Per che il mio viso in lei tutto era messo.

O Light Eternal, sole in Thyself that dwellest,
Sole knowest Thyself, and known unto Thyself,
And knowing, lovest and smilest on Thyself !
  That circulation which, being thus conceived,
Appeared in Thee as a reflected light,
When somewhat contemplated by mine eyes,
  Within itself, of its own very color,
Seemed to me painted with our effigy,
Wherefore my sight was all absorbed therein.
  Paradiso XXXIII., *Longfellow's Translation.*

VI.

THE RELIGION OF CHRIST.

By following with docility the three chief phases of modern agnostic thought we have been led into the presence of the threefold mystery which is the central glory of the Christian faith.

To what avail? If the assumption be true that the faith of the future must retain no element susceptible of challenge, our thought and time have been lost. The Christian conception of God can never be demonstrated. To Dante, most exalted of Catholic spirits, was granted the vision which we have found reflected in shadow by the very assertions of denial. The poet, gazing upon the threefold circle imprinted with the human image, dares with supreme audacity of thought to ask the *how*, the

inner method of the union. Nor is the desire of the pure in heart refused. His mind, he tells us, is "shaken by a flash," wherein "its will comes to it." We wait and listen; but alas! "All' alta fantasia qui manco possa" ("Here power fails the high imagining"); and the sacred poem, its long journey at an end, sinks abruptly into silence.

Nor can we wonder. For the very content and meaning of faith, as conceived by Christianity, removes sight from possible earthly experience; and he who demands proof can never accept its witness.

But if another assumption be true—and it is at least equally reasonable—if, as we claimed at the outset, the odds are in favor of that religion which meets most perfectly the cravings of the normal human soul, then we have summoned mighty witnesses, and their witness is agreed. In the Catholic faith, and there alone, the demands of the soul are met and its powers are set free.

The doubt which has pervaded our century began, in the time of Voltaire, with a purely intellectual and logical skepticism. Then came democracy; then came modern science; then came the higher criticism with its challenge of historic documents; and the great sequence of doubt was complete.

But in the very heart of the movement of doubt we have watched the birth of a reaction toward faith. A faith it has been, visible only in the night-time, a mere halo of reflected light, which has invaded and revealed the dark shadows of denial. Of this dim faith we have traced the wistful, significant progress. The thought which discards God is for a moment only exultant. Soon it realizes that in all the glorious phantasmagoria of nature there is no inspiration in living, no comfort in dying. We see it, with the pitiful sense of loss upon it, seeking if haply it may find. And first it tries to form for itself a religion out of its

very negation, and it cries aloud to the void; but there comes no answer. Next, thrown back upon himself, man tries to find in that very self the object of worship, the inspiration to conduct; but the attempt is like trying to lift one's own body, unaided, from the ground. Finally, impressed by a revival of the historical sense, recognizing, however reluctantly, that the faith of the past reached mightier results than the negation of the present, men seek to return in sentiment while advancing in conviction. They keep the forms of faith while sacrificing its content, and seek to emphasize the spiritual life while they deny the Spirit of God. But clear-eyed honesty cries shame upon them, and they leave us still earth-holden, met, if we lift up our eyes, by blank cloud, instead of by One who dwelleth in the heavens.

Within the limits of pure agnosticism—of the sweeping assumption that a personal God cannot be known to men—what

further solution could be offered? The agnostic movement is integral and complete. The abyss; humanity; the abstract moral law—these things are knowable. Here is the universe of the agnostic; here, if anywhere, must he seek salvation. He has sought; he has pressed each of these ideas to yield its full spiritual content; does the result, separately or united, respond to the human need?

In the consciousness of modern men these differing attitudes cross and recross in blended light and shade, with variety as infinite as that of human nature itself. Yet it is strange—it is also amazing—to watch the interrelation of the schools of agnostic thought. Identical in primary assumption, running into one another by gradations so delicate as to be almost invisible, there has been between their exponents a bitter and ceaseless war. The air of modern England has been hot with the breath of their controversy, and dark-

ened with the flight of their missiles. Pure individualism reigns among them. In the pages of ancient *Nineteenth Centuries*, Spencer and Harrison may be found fighting a duel *à outrance;* scientist heaps opprobrium on Positivist, and the Positivist replies—getting rather the best of it—with unsparing ridicule and unsweetened contempt. Theories give place to personalities before the end. Arnold, meantime, wanders about as a sharp-shooter, branding both combatants as Philistines, and aiming indiscriminately the arrowy darts of scorn. The little episode is typical. With much talk of solidarity, with many attempts to shape new churches, the agnostics flock by themselves.

Yet, above the voices of despair, of scoff, of complacency, of desire, is heard, steady, clear, undaunted, the unchanged confession of faith of the Catholic Church. And in this great confession, which gathers up into itself the highest wisdom of a mighty

literature, the truths revealed through sweep of centuries to a nation that could hear—in this confession are recognized all needs discovered by modern men. The demand for reverent recognition of encompassing mystery; the yearning for a nature akin to our own which can receive love and exact obedience; the honor of a moral force working through history and setting free the soul from world and self—all these are recognized, met, and fused by the faith in the Father, Son, and Spirit, one God, world without end. Here, and here alone, the complex search of the century finds answer; here "all strife is reconciled, all pain beguiled." The sense of an infinite Unknown quickened by scientific thought can waken in the soul something akin to adoration; it offers no appeal to the moral nature nor summons to the deed. The religion of humanity does hold incentive to action; but it permits no worship, for it forbids sight to rise

above its own level. The religion of tendencies recognizes righteousness as alone eternal; but it meets the need of concrete life with abstract truth. Add all these phases of thought—as, indeed, they blend often in a single consciousness, with result perplexed and strange—still we have offered us no assured standard of right, no answer to the mystery of pain, the deeper mystery of sin. The God in whom we believed of old, the Father of Light and Love, is lost to us; we find in His place a universe of matter and of law. But the cry of life can be satisfied by a Life alone. In the Religion of Christ, and there only, are met all those demands to which thought severed from Christ is driven—for an Object of Worship which shall transcend knowledge, for an Ideal thoroughly subject to knowledge, for a living Power so working in the soul with secret might that this Ideal may inspire us, not with despair, but with courage. Thus is force revealed as

loving, humanity as holy, and the moral law as divine. This is the assurance, wondrous, yet by the very witness of denial less wondrous than essential, brought to the world by Jesus Christ.

"Turn us again, O God of hosts, show the light of Thy countenance; and we shall be whole." "How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? forever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?" "Up, Lord, why sleepest Thou? awake, and be not absent from us forever." "Thou, O Lord God, art the thing that I long for." "Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so thirsteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they daily say unto me, Where is now thy God?" "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh also longeth after Thee in a barren and dry land, where no water is."

Such has been the cry of the human soul from the very dawn of history; such is its cry to-day. It has been the cry, not in disease, but in health. When life is strongest, when civilizations are in their vigorous, early prime, when individuals are most intensely and healthfully sensitive to the world around them—these are the times when consciousness of God is clear. In morbid and abnormal days, in the decadence of a nation, a race, or a soul, there may be diseased subtlety and lovely hues of death, but the craving for God is weakened. A symptom of vigor, of fullness of life, it cannot, by the scientific temper, be ignored. The highest result of evolution, it must have some objective correlative. It is in vain that those who deny call on us to find peace and energy in a doubt. Out of the very depth of denial speaks the witness of the shadows; a reflected light mingles with the darkness, and the needs of the soul are shown to be

eternal by the very men who reject most forcefully the eternal satisfaction of those needs.

We have other witness to the light besides this faint and sorrowful witness of shadow. There has been delicate, significant reaction all along, within the strictest limits of the agnostic movement; there has been a stronger reaction apart from the movement altogether, by thought which discards the agnostic assumption and returns, consciously or not, to a supernatural basis. The force of this reaction, independently of the churches, is evident if we look at literature. It is yet more visible in the tone of thought all around us. Uncompromising rigor of denial becomes less and less popular; a return to theistic conceptions is more and more marked; and the vogue of wild and crude philosophies, avowedly from the East, or originating one hardly knows where in thought's provincial byways, witnesses to

the insistent demand for genuine and sincere faith in the Spirit, and to reaction toward even an unsafe and unbalanced mysticism on the part of a generation which was assuredly drawn for a brief moment toward a material interpretation of life.

Among all the shifting phases of modern spiritual thought and passion there is one which has remained constant, which no attack has been able to shake, which controversy does but intensify, which may well be both center and starting-point for the positive faith of the future. It is the attitude toward the Lord of the Church. For, through all its conflict, all its denial, the nineteenth century will not let Christ go. Eighteen hundred years ago lived and died this Galilean working-man. Since then our universe has been enlarged by the discoveries of countless worlds, our minds enriched by new arts, sciences, philosophies, new knowledge of the history of our race. Still the eyes of the Aryan

world remain fixed on this one Man—a Man obscure in life, ignominious in death. Still this gracious Figure, shining down the centuries, draws the hearts and thoughts of men supremely to Himself. Christ came to bring the message of a Father above, of a Spirit within, saving us unto life eternal. This message men discard. Nay, the very record of Christ's life and death they criticize in its every detail, reducing the gospel story to a mosaic of legend and sentiment in which fragments of truth may with difficulty be discerned. Christ's message they disbelieve, His story they distrust. Yet this mythical character, this Jesus of Nazareth, of whom we know next to nothing, whose intellectual conceptions are childishness to enlightened days—this obscure Jew is the center of human experience to-day, as for eighteen hundred years He has been the center of human history. Concerning His nature men quarrel; His historic existence they doubt;

but escape Him they cannot. Agnostic of every order—scientist, ethicist, apostle of culture, man of art—all bow before Him in utter reverence, as they hail Him Master of the human race.

Ours, we said at the outset, has been a century of the inner life. The eighteenth century, apart from a limited area, questioned far less than we, but it believed less intensely. To us are given the signs of a new life, new yet old. Denial has spent its force. In its very depths was a witness full yet faint, as the cries of the soul claimed unconsciously element after element of the faith which it discarded. Meanwhile the fervent reaction toward theism, the reassertion of the Spirit, the devotion to the person and the teaching of Christ, all whisper promise of the day to be.

What of the Christian Church? As the movement toward belief has developed, directly and indirectly, without her limits, has she been stagnant or still?

Surely not. Yet in grief and grave regret her own children must be first to arraign her for her shortcomings. Toward each phase of denial the Church in England opposed at first a blank antagonism. She met the skepticism of the eighteenth century with an appeal to respectability and the Establishment. In the ardent social awakening of the Revolution she stood selfishly for alliance with the old social order. She confronted the eager discoveries of science with the literal authority of an infallible Book; and since, by a certain poetic justice, the higher criticism, with keen historical analysis, has denied this authority, she has too often fallen back on simple self-assertion.

She has her reward. The appeal to authority with which she has met each new cry of freedom falls dead upon our ears. Men may and do seek thankfully the shelter of the Church; they are guided thither by no orthodox traditions, but by

individual prayer and struggle. They may and must, in choosing their creed, be deeply influenced by the faith of the past; but that faith is to them a form, not of authority, but of testimony. In matters religious as in matters social we must form our creeds for ourselves. If the blessing of faith is granted us it is because our own ears have heard a Voice, on our own path a Light has shined. The power of the Church is yet mighty, but her old prestige is gone. She speaks with no lack of assurance, but henceforth she must convince before she can command.

Yet this change is no loss to the Church of Christ; it is surely rather gain. Shaking aside "the torpor of assurance," she has risen in renewed vigor of life. From the time of Coleridge, indeed, from whom she received so sharp an intellectual stimulus, her sluggishness was at an end. In the Oxford Movement came a sudden and mighty spiritual revival. In the

movement, less formal, but no less vital, inaugurated by Frederic Denison Maurice the spiritual emphasis was reinforced for the first time by the social, and the church gained the inspiration of new and more exacting ideals. Since the time of Maurice that social renascence, which is also essentially a Christian renascence, has steadily gained momentum. It has become the dominant spiritual fact in the closing century-decade, and bids fair to be the great and living interest leading us into the world of the future. Toward this social renascence what will be the attitude of the Church of Christ? Now is her hour of trial. One hundred years ago a like test was offered her and she failed. To-day the opportunity is hers once more. How will she meet it?

Hints of the answer come in each new phase of the industrial crisis; but in full it is not yet given. Yet surely we need not doubt nor fear. One hundred years ago

there lay behind the Church a century of respectability and indolence. To-day there lies behind her a century of life. Challenge and attack have roused her, fierce heart-searchings have shaken her, intellectual prestige has deserted her, social prestige is no longer tied exclusively to her train. Free, she is learning to rejoice in her freedom; poor, in her poverty; while her very rejection by the proud in spirit and intellect may well teach her to turn to those whom she has neglected, but among whom her true home is to be found—the ignorant, the oppressed, and the humble. A mighty future lies, if she will, before her. Her external authority is gone. A necessary safeguard in her youth, she can dispense with it in her maturity. Her attitude of hostility to other thought is ceasing also. The fear of doubt is an evil form of doubt; for

> "The man who feareth, Lord, to doubt,
> In that fear doubteth Thee."

From Christianity all modern faith, how-

ever unconsciously, springs; to Christianity it must return. The sense of finite ignorance, the passionate love for men, the recognition of force making for righteousness —all these, with their colored and partial glory, unite in the white and simple light of the Christian faith. And in the ideal Church of Christ are found waiting the means by which these great truths may be made part of the daily life of men. Through her the glory of the Infinite is revealed to that humanity which, standing at the height of natural evolution, serves as a meeting-place between the material and the divine. In her as the family of brethren, nay, the very body of Christ, is fully realized the collective conception of the race as an organic whole. Her great sacraments present not only types of spiritual truth, but channels through which the influx of the Spirit of righteousness may purify and feed the human soul. No ecclesiastical organization to force faith on reluctant minds,

no club to formulate a dogmatic theology or to unite men in practical beneficence, but the mighty mother who feeds her children with the very bread of life, the Church Catholic may in the future command allegiance, not by the claims she asserts, but by the power she reveals; not by an authority imposed from without, but by a life manifest from within.

O Spirit, Purifier from all sin, purify the inward eyes of our nature, that we may see the Light of Truth, and by His light may see the supreme Father, whom none but the pure in heart may behold. Come, O blessed Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE END.

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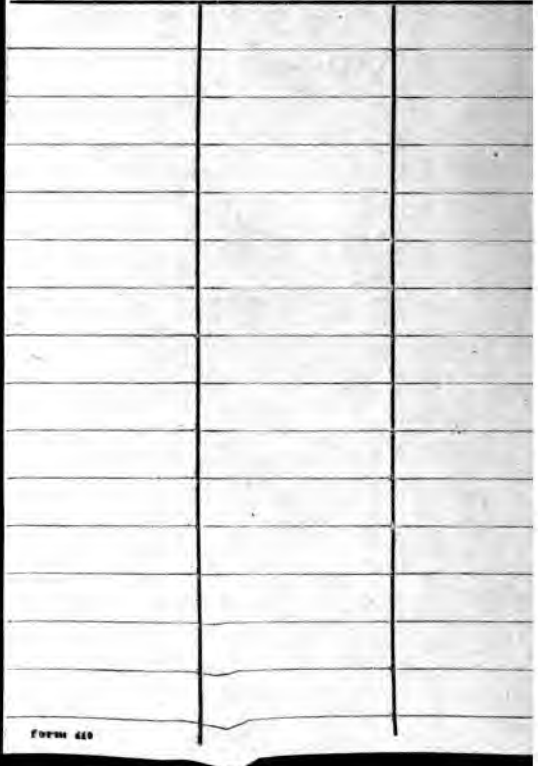
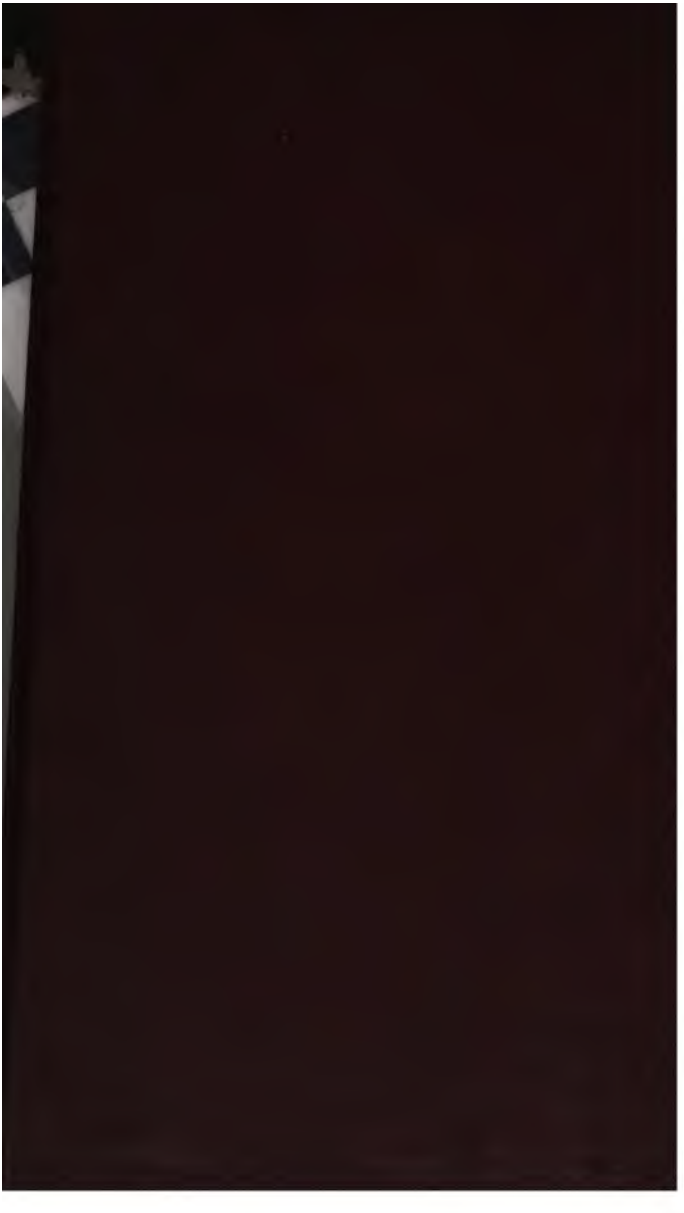
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